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PREFACE

121 101 The work herewith presented to the public is the first of a series on West China. It deals with a circumscribed area in northwest Yün-nan, Hsi-k'ang, Tibet and southwest Ssu-ch'uan inhabited by the Na-khi tribe known to the Chinese as Mo-so 麼些. While the region has been explored geographically in the strictest sense of the word, yet it includes areas, such as that of the Wu-so 五所 in southwestern Ssu-ch'uan, very little known, and visited at best by one two or three Europeans including the author.

Most explorers are content with a hurried reconnaissance of a given area, their aim being to cover as much territory as possible in the time at their disposal. Not so the author. I have spent twelve years exploring thoroughly the Na-khi inhabited part of Yün-nan, Hsi-k'ang 西康 and adjacent areas; first as agricultural explorer of the United States Department of Agriculture of Washington, D.C., then for the National Geographic Society of the same city and finally on my own, when I could devote my time exclusively to the study of the Na-khi tribe, their literature and the land they occupy.

127 Before undertaking to write this work, I spent the major part of my savings collecting, first of all, the Chinese literature on West China and eastern Tibet, and second, all publications in European languages pertaining to this area. I secured the various editions of the topographies or T'ung-chih 通志 not only of the western provinces, but of all the eighteen provinces of China and its dependencies; I bought all the local gazetteers, Hsien-chih 縣, Chou-chih 州, and T'ing-chih 廳 of Yün-nan, Ssu-ch'uan, Kan-su, and Tibet, published by the Chinese authorities from the Ming days to the present. These western China gazetteers have become exceedingly rare due to the devastations of the Mohammedan rebellion, which lasted for nearly 25 years, when all the printing blocks were destroyed and editions, stored in the official Yamens of the various districts, were burnt. Such records as were no longer obtainable in the provinces, I had copied from unica found only in the Palace Library and the National Library of Peping. The Catholic Mission Library of Zikawei near Shanghai, rich in gazetteers, had also consented to have its rare and precious books copied. My own library contains many rare works not to be found in other libraries in Asia, Europe or America.

While living in Li-chiang, the capital of the former Na-khi Kingdom, I had all important inscriptions on stelae copied, and personally photographed genealogical records of tribal chiefs, precious manuscripts, heirlooms dating back to the T'ang and Sung dynasties. In addition, I collected over 4,000 ancient Na-khi pictographic manuscripts. A number of these are of historic interest, while the remainder deal with the religious literature of the Na-khi which is akin to the Bön, the pre-Buddhistic religion of Tibet.

114 My predilection for Chinese characters made me begin the study of the Chinese written language at the age of 15. It created a desire in me to explore the vast hinterland of China and to learn to know its history and geography at first hand. It caused me to study the ancient Na-khi language, now no more in use, but preserved in the pictographic literature, which has at last given up its secrets. Thus equipped, I undertook the task of delving into the history of this fascinating and wonderful country, which I covered

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on foot and horseback from Siam to southwestern Mongolia. In the pages of this work, I describe the Na-khi region as it passed in review before my eyes: a wealth of scenic beauty, marvellous forest, flowers and friendly tribes. Those years of travel and the fellowship of the tribal people who accompanied me on my many journeys will remain forever among the happiest memories of my life.

I owe a debt of gratitude not only to the institutions and societies that made these explorations possible, but also to the faithful members of the Na-khi tribe, fearless, honest and dependable at all times. To them, the success of my various expeditions is mainly due.

The historical part of this book is based on original Chinese works which it would be impossible to enumerate. In the copious notes, references are given to the works from which they were translated, perhaps not as fully as would be desirable; but those familiar with Chinese geographical and historical literature will have no difficulty in finding them. Many of the local gazetteers consulted may, however, be found only in my own library.

The photographs were taken by myself, mainly under the auspices of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY of Washington, D. C., to the authorities of which I wish here to express my sincerest thanks for the permission to reproduce them. Others again were taken while I worked in the region on my own.

I beg the reader's indulgence and also that of the sinologues and of my many Chinese friends who will have occasion to consult this work. Their constructive criticism will not be resented, but is earnestly solicited. This book found shape under the most trying circumstances. I began the actual writing in 1934, not dreaming that serious interruptions would delay its completion for over a decade.

We were twice evacuated from Yün-nan when it was invaded by the Chinese Red Army and I was forced to send my entire library to the Indo-Chinese border. We packed again when Japanese bombers visited K'un-ming (Yün-nan fu) and left death and destruction in their wake. To prevent possible destruction of my library, I moved to Dalat, Indo-China, where, after a year and a half of residence, it again became necessary to pack up and transfer my library to Honolulu. These many interruptions and the hectic weeks and months of delay form the most unpleasant part of my experiences.

I wish to express my thanks to the Trustees of the Harvard-Yenching Institute and to its director, Professor Serge Elisséeff, who approved the publication of this book and to the U. S. Army Map Service for the printing of the maps included with the accompanying Gazetteer.

As consultant to the U. S. Army Map Service in 1944–1945 I was privileged to correct the aeronautical charts of western China and eastern Tibet and to examine original Chinese maps of the border region. The latter leave much to be desired; the Chinese characters used on these maps often vary considerably from those actually employed in the region itself, nor is the topography to be relied on. This is of course mainly due to the difficulty of travel in the borderlands, to the lack of communication, and partly to hostile inhabitants.

PREFACE

000 These studies were never intended for public consumption, but for personal benefit and enlightenment; and it was only at the request of several friends, coupled with the fear of permanent loss owing to the disturbed state of the country, that I was induced to submit them for publication. The object of the studies was to obtain the Chinese view point concerning the many mysterious customs and practices which perplexed me in daily intercourse with this people. In order to attain this end two things have had to be rigorously guarded against—first, an adverse spirit of criticism, which closes up every avenue of information; and second, the danger of being content when only personal curiosity is satisfied instead of trying to see things as the Chinese see them.

127 It should be stated that no foreign text books have been studied; questions of a scientific, ethnological and comparative nature have been set aside in order to present the local view of the subject in hand. The writer does not claim to have fully attained his end or to have exhausted the information obtainable on any given subject; while variations may be found in almost every county in the province, to say nothing of the whole of China.

The little city of Kwan Hsien, which lies 40 miles to the north-west of Chengtu in the province of Szechuan, is the hub of "The Tibetan Foothills." It was from this centre, so richly endowed with natural beauty, so famous for its ancient yet efficient irrigation system, so crowded with a teeming cosmopolitan population, that these pages were gradually compiled.

The whole of the subject matter contained in this volume has passed through the pages of the "New China Review," under the editorship of Mr. Samuel Couling to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude for editing the MS. and correcting the proofs. If the printing, numbering and colour of paper should not be quite uniform all readers will kindly consider the difficulty under which the Editor has laboured while putting these papers through his magazine.

JAMES HUTSON

Chengtu, January, 1921. [v] [iv blank]